

Drug Laboratory Staff Meeting
Friday, November 16, 2007
11:30 am – 1:00 pm / Room 133

Attendees: Kate Corbett, Annie Dookhan, Daniela Frasca, Xiu-ying Gao, Lisa Glazer, Michael Lawler, Nicole Medina, Julianne Nassif, Elisabeth O'Brien, Gloria Phillips, Peter Piro, Kristen Pribeck, Daniel Renczkowski, Stephen Ridley, Charles Salemi, Della Saunders, Shirley Sprague, Allan Stevenson, Zhi Yi Tan, Mai Tran

Agenda

1. Eat pizza
2. Describe the long-range vision for the laboratory
3. Highlight recent accomplishments
4. Embrace change
5. Brainstorm ideas
6. Identify opportunities for improvement

→ Pizza

Pizza and refreshments were enjoyed by all.

→ Long-range Vision for the Laboratory & Embracing Change

Julie Nassif, Chuck Salemi, and Cam Stevenson acknowledged the hard work and excellent job done by all Drug Lab and Evidence Office staff. The amount of samples submitted far exceeds other laboratories in the region, and the sample processing time is impressive. Julie has full confidence in the ability of the staff to be flexible and help solve problems as they arise, and would appreciate any suggestions by staff to help improve operations.

The Drug Lab has been and will undergo many changes over the next few years. The five-year vision for the laboratory includes: Increasing analytical capabilities, integrate automation, improve staffing levels, modernizing documents management, upgrading physical space, significantly decreasing sample turnaround time, effectively communicate laboratory successes and articulating needs, and achieve accreditation. Accreditation would most likely entail fundamental changes to processes, procedures, record keeping, and other functions. She also realizes that some of the changes may decrease turnaround time on a temporary basis, but are necessary to move the lab forward.

Chuck does a wonderful job leading the lab, and the laboratory reporting structure will be reorganized to streamline administrative functions. Mike

Lawler, Betsy O'Brien, Peter Piro, and Della Saunders will report to Chuck directly. All other staff will report to one of those four individuals, although the details have not been worked out as of this meeting.

The new organizational structure will also dovetail well with as part of the building-wide push towards a quality improvement (QI) program. Currently, the State Lab functions using a quality assurance/quality control (QA/QC) model. The QA/QC model relies on a top-down structure: the QA/QC staff meet mainly with laboratory supervisors, and information gets passed down to analysts. The end result is paramount, and regulatory requirements drive activities. Using a QI model, information is exchanged between analysts and supervisors, and good processes to produce a quality product are emphasized. Quality teams will be formed to describe processes, identify steps where problems occur, and recommend and implement changes.

Writing formal standard operating procedures (SOP's) for the lab is an important step towards a QI model, and some lab staff, such as Peter Piro, have already started drafting documents. Developing formal Standard Operation Procedures (SOPs), flowcharts, and reviewing current forms will help all staff to insure that process and procedures are consistent. Written documentation will also help train new chemists.

In terms of long-range visions for the laboratory, accreditation by the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors/Laboratory Accreditation Board (ASCLD/LAB) is a definite goal. ASCLD/LAB accreditation would help the laboratory maintain high quality standards by participating in proficiency tests, ensuring a document filing standard, and would help bring cachet to the chemists when testifying in court.

Proficiency testing is another important component to adhere to continuous quality improvement for technical knowledge. Although testing proficiency samples decrease overall turn-around-time slightly, the program would be a valuable addition to help chemists retain high quality standards in the laboratory. Proficiency testing is also an important aspect of becoming an accredited laboratory.

→ Accomplishments & Acknowledgements

The Evidence Office Safe and Room 355 (Cam's office/independent chemist area) have been redesigned. New shelving and desk space has improved the efficiency and safety for staff, card cabinets have been removed from the office and safe to increase space and comfort, and records boxes have been removed from the office.

Tan and Paul Servizio authored a paper on analysis of GHB in sugary matrices, and the paper was accepted by the Journal of Forensic Sciences. Comments have been made by the journal, and we will announce the publication date when it is available.

The new Visual FoxPro Drug Lab Application is in the beta test stage. Cam Stevenson has been working closely with Kip Dole to develop the new program, and it is expected to help the Evidence Office staff enter samples in more quickly and efficiently. The new program also has the ability to run reports and track specimens.

**→ *Brainstorming & Opportunities for Improvement*
Training/Professional Development**

DEA Training is offered in Quantico, Virginia four times per year. Julie has requested funding for two staff to travel to DEA Training on the Byrne Grant.

Cross-training staff is definitely good for redundancy, but turn-around time will decrease while the training is happening. Cross-training is an important component to long-range planning for laboratory operations.

Expert Witness Training will help chemists prepare for both federal and state court. This could be done in conjunction with the District Attorney's office and serve a twofold purpose: the chemists will gain a better understanding of the trial process, and the DA's will obtain more knowledge about the Drug Laboratory and scientific process. Lisa Glazer noted that Mock Trials were a helpful addition to her training.

Several members of the Drug Laboratory are members of the Northeast Association of Forensic Scientists (NEAFS), and the annual meeting is a great opportunity to meet other chemists to discuss current issues.
www.neafs.org

The New England Branch of the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas (HIDTA) offers free training classes in Methuen; several staff have attended these courses and found them to be informative and helpful.
<http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/HIDTA/newengland.html>

Chuck Salemi mentioned that he has taken several college-level chemistry courses over the years, and those courses were extremely valuable and enhanced his technical skills. Instrument manufacturers, such as Agilent, offer technical trainings or webcasts.

Professional Development Courses

The state offers many professional development courses in management techniques, interpersonal relations, writing, public speaking, and computer courses. Staff are encouraged to peruse these offerings and discuss possible classes with their supervisor.

A complete list of all professional development courses offered by the state can be found at the PACE Learning Management Program:http://hrconnectsus.ehs.state.ma.us/eohhs/programs/csd/other/PACE/PACE_find_a_class.asp

Communication

The Drug Laboratory needs to develop mechanisms to effectively communicate the importance of the work performed and the relevance to the Department as a whole. Key allies are Judges, District Attorneys, Police Officers, and the DPH Commissioner, and the DPH Bureau of Substance Abuse Services. Under Massachusetts state law (Chapter 111, Section 12), DPH must provide drug testing for law enforcement agencies free of charge.

Cam Stevenson noted that the District Attorneys hold a quarterly DA Association meeting, and it would be helpful to have a representative from the Drug Lab at the meeting to share knowledge, discuss strategies, and work together to handle common issues.

The Drug Lab Newsletter was created for Police Officers to alert them to drug trends and provide general information to enhance communication with the law enforcement community. The Newsletter receives very positive responses from the Officers, and some even use it to train new staff. Julie Nassif volunteered Kristen Pribeck to work with Betsy O'Brien to help generate the Newsletter for distribution. To enhance our visibility with Officers and assist them, we could create some flash cards with pictures of drugs, some general information including a formal definition, class, and commonly found paraphernalia.

Another Newsletter geared toward DA's and Judges could also be developed as another communication tool. The Drug Lab Monthly report is currently distributed and posted on the DPH website, but some aspects could be changed to insure it is read and understood by the Judges and DA's.

Unusual drug trends could also be documented and distributed to law enforcement and other communities to publicize the particular threat and bring recognition to the variety of testing performed by the Drug Laboratory. Geographic Information Systems (GIS) maps could be created and distributed to an appropriate audience to track drug trends and pinpoint the "hot spots" of drug activity in Massachusetts.

The Health and Homeland Alert Network (HHAN) may also be a good resource for distributing information quickly to Police Departments and Local Boards of Health.

Julie Nassif noted that professional meetings where staff could present posters and abstracts are good tools for staff development and peer interaction.